DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH PHILIP REEKER, COUNSELOR FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF STATE, BAGHDAD SUBJECT: THE ROLE OF PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAMS VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM IRAQ TIME: 10:15 A.M. EDT DATE: FRIDAY, AUGUST 3, 2007

(Note: Please refer to www.defendamerica.mil for more information.)

CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (Chief, New Media Operations, OASD PA): With us on the line this morning Mr. Philip Reeker who's the counselor for Public Affairs at the Department of State. He's going to be talking to us about the provincial reconstruction teams in Iraq. A really interesting concept and conversation topic this morning.

Mr. Reeker, welcome to the "Bloggers Roundtable." Thank you, sir, for joining us.

MR. REEKER: Thank you very much. And I thank you all for joining today. Greetings from Baghdad.

No matter who I hear from either in the states or in Europe, where I was most recently posted, they keep telling me how hot it is. And no matter where you are, it's hotter here, let me tell you. It was 122 in the shade yesterday.

So I just came back, in fact, about three hours ago from a troop from a trip to the provincial reconstruction team in Nineveh Province, just outside Mosul. And we can talk a little bit about that. But this is an interesting area for me in particular. I've been here on Ambassador Crocker's team now for about seven weeks. I came from being the deputy head of mission at Embassy Budapest. So a very different environment. And Ryan Crocker asked me to come out and join him, along with so many other people that he's brought on board.

And one of the areas we really wanted to look at from public affairs was these provincial reconstruction teams, which are kind of a new idea. They're a little different than some of the teams that were started out in Afghanistan. These are State Department led. And I don't know how much background people have, so I'll just kind of go through some basic points about it and maybe talk about a few of the interesting stories we've seen and then get to your questions.

These are obviously, you know, civilian-military units led by a State Department officer. There are now 25 of them to date. There were originally about 10 and after the president announced the new way forward -- or the surge, as people have called it -- in January, we started building up and have added to it. So there are 10 original full-sized PRTs, five smaller ones and then 10 what we call embedded PRTs where the State Department, or the civilian team, works directly with the brigade combat and gets guidance both from the U.S. ambassador and the commanding general -- from General Petraeus and the folks here at MNFI.

The basic goal of these teams is to expand out into the provinces. Iraq is not a small country and it has no tradition, really, of local or diffused leadership or governance. It's been very centralized. Certainly, under the Saddam Hussein dictatorship the Ba'athist regime was a very centralized regime. These are kind of new concepts for a lot of these folks out in the region in the 18 provinces. And local government, as well as democracy as a whole, is sort of a new concept.

So these teams work directly with the local leaders to bolster moderate, and obviously promote reconciliation, which is a broad term, but helping them to recognize opportunities for compromise and accommodation. Also, we're trying to gain support for counterinsurgency operations. That's where the military side comes in. There's a lot of fostering of development. We have AID people -- USAID people at most of the PRTs and this is a kind of capacity building exercise, which in some ways is very useful to have even before you can undertake some of the more traditional major development programs.

And really, when you talk about capacity building a lot of it is for Iraqi officials -- how to perform their duties. They don't have a tradition, as I said, of local governance, how to interface with the central government. The ministries under Iraq's system have enormous power, but how do they get that out to the regions? How do the regions get what they feel they deserve and expect? And these teams can sort of help them with that.

Obviously, they focus more on a political environment rather than solid infrastructure. They are expeditionary in nature, so they aren't building big sites or infrastructure to be turned over to the Iraqis. The idea is they would, of course, move on at some point. Some of them, I think, have the potential -- like where I was in Mosul -- to be converted into consulates in due course and become essentially U.S. consulates in the major cities, Mosul being the second largest or third largest -- depending whose count you pay attention to -- city in Iraq.

So they really have a broad array of support. They get with the local Iraqis and decide what the priorities should be and that helps determine who makes up the PRTs. So what kind of specialists they bring in. And one of the tricks has been to get the right people, the right skills sets, in right away.

You'll recall that early on there was some criticism -- I think more from misunderstanding than anything else -- that while the State Department itself wasn't able to stand up and send these people -- and it's true the State Department doesn't have, necessarily, the types of skill sets -- civil engineers or veterinary scientists -- that meet the needs of what that particular region and that provincial reconstruction team are doing towards the development and capacity building in that particular location.

And so while they go out and look for these people, we have been able to tap into the vast resources of the U.S. military -- particularly the Reserve Corps -- and so you can find the specialists and bring them out. And I think that's worked quite well. And slowly, as those people finish their rotation, then we find the others. They're filling that out and more and State Department people, but others -- contractors -- are coming at the same time and they're exploring, you know, looking at who are the best people. They may be third country nationals, in some cases, to bring these guys out, not just a veterinary scientist. You need -- the ambassador says you need a guy that really knows sheep husbandry. And you want to get the right person with the right skills and willing to take on what in some cases is not an easy living situation. There's still a lot of security issues in some of these places.

When we were out and about in Mosul yesterday, it's very heavy security, even though the military feels there's been a lot of progress there -- we still have heavy military escort. And that's a necessary stage in all of this. So we have seen, I think, some interesting progress up in Mosul. For instance, a year ago their criminal system was kind of a shambles. Some people talked about it as the catch-and-release model of criminal justice and local judges that were reluctant to try terrorism cases for fear of reprisal. And now through the program that the PRT there in Mosul has -- what they've facilitated -- they have judges from Baghdad have been able to come up from the major crimes court down here and resolve cases there. And that has led, according to my colleagues to what they see as a noticeable change in the how the justice system is viewed.

There's a whole new confidence about the justice system and it has led to a decrease in crime and terrorism. We heard from a police chief there who was quite emphatic -- I'm sure somewhat for our benefit yesterday -- but I think genuinely determined to sort of say this sort of terrorist activity is not going to be tolerated in his district and the Nineveh province. And talking about the things they've done and how they've learned from the Americans, and having the close working relationship among the civilians and the military to help fight that.

And our PRT has assisted the government there in executing almost a quarter-of-a-billion dollars in government of Iraq reconstruction and infrastructure funds. Again, one of the problems being that there was no tradition of the provinces working on their own, having their own initiative draw from the resources owed them by the central government.

And I think we in the United States have a lot of experience with that, the sort of state/federal relationship plus local -- whether it's city or county -- and the specializations we bring there have helped them to do that.

So the decentralization of government services is one major area. And that plays right in with the Iraqi constitution of 2005, which mandates more provincial powers and a sort of devolution of some power to the regions. That means rule of law is a very important aspect. I mentioned the justice project up there in Nineveh province.

Infrastructure is another thing that's being focused on: economic development, governance. And we do quite a bit of public diplomacy for our own benefit in terms of reaching out to the Iraqi people at this local level. And that was interesting to see there as well. And so each of these PRTs has a public diplomacy officer who works closely with the military/civilian affairs folks on that side of the shop.

Definitely an interagency effort. You'll see not only State and DOD and USAID, but the Justice Department, Department of Agriculture, Health and Human Services -- just all kinds of people being drawn from our federal workforce, depending on the needs of the particular location.

So it is unique. It's kind of a model, I think. Finally it's an embodiment of what Secretary Rice has talked about for a while and that is this concept of transformational diplomacy, not traditional. Really taking a look at the particular unique characteristics of a location -- even at the sub-national level at the regional or provincial level -- and tuning your diplomatic and security relationship to meet the needs there not only to pursue our own goals in terms of U.S. foreign policy and then a broader Iraq effort, but to meet the goals of the local people.

You know, there are mixed -- I don't want to suggest that it's perfect in every region. Some places the security really is tough and the teams are not able to get out nearly as much as they would like to. In other places -- both in the Kurdish regions -- they practically go out and about as they would in so many other countries where the security is much more solid and they have all kinds of relationships. You see these guys sort of mated up with the sheiks and the local governors -- often at their side day in, day out. They do a whole host of things: advise them on how to conduct the next local council meeting. People turn to them and it's an interesting development and something that I don't think has gotten quite the attention that it might, which is why, of course we invited you all on today and I offered to come on and talk about this.

So with that, let me turn it over to questions. I don't have all the answers, but we'd be happy to try to follow up as best we could. And if anybody's interested in being in touch directly with a PRT team leader, or one of the public diplomacy officers out in these locations, we'd be happy to facilitate that as well.

MR. HOLT: All right. Thank you very much, sir. Mr. Philip Reeker, counselor for Public Affairs, Department of State.

And we will -- as I mentioned before, we can use me as that lynchpin and we'll get that circulated out and make sure everybody gets connected.

Andrew Lubin with U.S. Calvary OnPoint. You were first on the line. Why don't you get it started?

Q Great.

Mr. Reeker, Andrew Lubin from OnPoint. Thank you for taking the time to talk to us this afternoon, sir.

MR. REEKER: Sure.

Q Great.

Two questions -- or actually a part one and a part two. Can you address the makeup of a normal PRT team as far as the economics, governance, what type of skill sets you're looking for? And part two: I'd like to talk specifically about Anbar. I met the PRT team when I was -- who was coming in when I was there in April. And they were stationed at Camp Ramadi. They didn't seem to want to get out into the city at all and meet people. How do they work when they don't want to come off base?

MR. REEKER: Yeah, let me talk about that, because it was interesting to see it up in -- yesterday in Mosul, too. You know, the city is still a kind of a tough place. As I said, we have to have a lot of security in there. And yet, the soldiers there are -- you know, they know the locals. They are clearly recognized at the market that we went through -- a kind of bustling market, which surprised me. And so they do get out a bit.

It's this constant challenge of security versus openness. It's kind of what we face in diplomacy all around the world, I guess, to a degree. And obviously, in the environment in Iraq it's just exponentially tougher. You do what you can and what we found in some of these places, you know, they are able to get out with the escorts and that's the great thing about it. But the State Department folks -- Ambassador Crocker -- has pretty much just decreed, you know, you will just be able to do the same thing the military does.

We have, as you may have read in some of the reporting, been really challenged by this. The State Department's own security regulations, which are designed for, you know, a different type of environment and have been a challenge for us due to -- to do anything. You know, if you paid attention purely to State security regs, we wouldn't be here at all. The embassy would probably be closed up. But it's a different world. It's a different environment. There are real reasons and priorities for us to be out here. And if the military can do it, Ambassador Crocker said we're going to do it too. So we work so closely with them and do get out and do try to get the locals in.

It's tough. It's tough to break that barrier. And I think you just have to do it in one day at a time and each individual place is different. There are certainly areas where they just aren't getting out. If you look down in some of the spots in the south -- Basra has been problematic recently and our folks don't get out nearly as much.

Now, to your first question about the make up of a typical PRT -- it differs a little bit from one to the other. Again, each one could ask for what they want. But a typical team -- and I kind of have a general chart -- we have a civilian leader and a deputy team leader, who would be usually the military person. You'll have a rule of law coordinator -- most often from the Department of Justice, sometimes from the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Legal Issues. You'll have somebody usually from economic development background that may be a State

Department Officer or a USAID person. And then an AG person. It's very common -- not every PRT, but there are about half a dozen that have a very strong agriculture presence.

They're doing some of that up in Mosul as well. It's kind of a breadbasket region. And the combination of USDA and USAID -- they are working to help get some of the AG production back up and looking at export opportunities, which obviously, will have a domino effect on the markets there and on the economy.

You obviously have security people as well. You may have an engineering presence. If there are civil engineering questions and where they need advice, you'll have that. These local governance teams often include USAID experts in that. And some of the PRTs will have a specific team of three to five. They may be contractors, specialists that can help set up local governments. I mentioned that we have a public diplomacy assistant or officer in just about every one of the PRTs now. That kind of gives you the standard makeup. The embedded PRTs that actually are part of the brigade, they will be as small four people. They will just have a very core mix of a couple of State Department people and may an AID person.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Q Okay, great. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir.

Grim, blackfive.

Q Good morning. This is Grim of blackfive.net.

I would like to ask you a bit about your recruiting process for getting people with the specialized skills you need. We have an interested readership. A lot of the people on the call do.

How is State reaching out to find Americans with the skills they need? Is there somewhere that we can direct people to to see what your recruiting needs are for these PRTs, which seem like

an important part of the overall effort. And of course, we'd like to help you hook up with the folks you're looking for.

MR. REEKER: You know, that's actually a great idea. And I have to admit, I should have thought of that beforehand. I will get in touch and get back to you with the contacts in Washington that are spearheading that. I know there's various channels through the federal government and the existing workforce that they've used to try to identify people, but also advertising and other ways of recruiting.

And I want to get you a real answer, because I don't -- that's not something I've been involved with from this end out here in Iraq.

Let's see if we can get you something, because I think you're right. You guys have the audience and the readers that are the types of people that may be exactly what we're looking for.

Q They may be. I know quite about horses, for example, but I don't remember seeing in any of the trade publications an ad saying, "Come work for the State Department."

MR. REEKER: Yeah, well, exactly. You know, there are still regulations in the State Department Foreign Affairs Manual that tell you how you can you can bring your horse to post. (Chuckles.) Anyway, we'll -- let me follow up on that one and get you some stuff -- you know, even provide some links or something so that people can get into the proper spot to see what's available.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay, very good. We'll follow up on that.

Richard Fernandez, Belmont Club.

Q Hi. I was -- just this morning Secretary of Defense Gates said that the reconciliation efforts between the Shi'a and the Sunni weren't going as well as they might, and I was wondering whether the PRT teams were, apart from the capacity building, engaged in any kind of direct political work to try and influence the grass roots to sort of marry up with the higher-level political goals of the United States in Iraq, such as, for example --

MR. REEKER: No, that's a very good point, and I think that is -- Ambassador Crocker has addressed this a little bit. And you're absolutely right. I saw Secretary Gates' remarks as well, that

for a lot of people this political process has been much more difficult than anticipated. I think it's even more difficult than the Iraqis anticipated.

And whereas locally we have seen some major positive steps -- if you take a look at Anbar, which has been talked about quite a bit, where you've gotten a certain amount of reconciliation, where you've gotten tribal chiefs who have decided, "Wait a minute, we are interested in working with the Americans" -- you know, may not be out biggest fans on the planet but have come to sort of accommodations and realized that we have the same interests in security and moving forward. They have been quite interested and willing in taking our advice in establishing local governance.

You know, this democracy thing can be kind of catching, and as these guys figure it out at the local level and figure out what they can -- you know, the stronger they are, the more they can then demand and look for from the central government.

Whether that can seep into the central government I think is a very good question and one that we would follow up with. That's why I think these PRTs are a good model, and we have several of them in Baghdad itself where certain areas of Baghdad -- which of course can -- as you know, have been scenes of some of the worst sectarian fighting -- can through -- you know, through these mechanisms of local councils and other ways can kind of find accommodation and compromise and resolve things, which is what the national government needs to do.

That has proved to be very hard. It is, as you've heard Ambassador Crocker say, really a result of the legacy not only of the last four very turbulent years but the three decades of Ba'athist rule which really destroyed any civil society, NGOs, social structures, right down to, you know, family units, which Saddam disrupted in order to prevent any form of outer power base emerging. And it takes a long time to get over that, particularly when throughout your whole history you didn't really have a strong tradition of local government or evolution of power. And so that's what's taking a lot more time than anyone expected and requires an awful lot of hard work both by us but certainly by the Iraqis.

But these models are all good, I think, the more we can show. And one of the things we did yesterday, going up to Mosul, was took with us quite a few Iraqi press, television from Baghdad, and they were more excited to see this than others because they of course can't travel and get around easily either through the security. And so to be taken up there and actually get a look at what's going on in Mosul, get a bit of an understanding about how this PRT has been working with local authorities -- I saw some real interest on the part of the Iraqi media. And as they translate that back to the public here in center, in Baghdad, it will be interesting to see what more interest we get.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Thank you, sir.

Dave Dilegge, Small Wars Journal.

Q Good day, Mr. Reeker. Dave Dilegge here from Small Wars Journal and Small Wars Council. If I could add one thing: Like Blackfive, our readership is real -- a lot of them are very

interested in how to join a PRT, and we have people from extensive backgrounds. If I could say something -- both the Department of State and the Department of Defense do have PRT job opportunity pages, and I could send anybody that link.

As far as my --

MR. REEKER: Is that through the state.gov website, for instance?

Q Yes. I have a link on Wednesday's post that -- right to both sites that describe the process for applying for a PRT.

MR. REEKER: Okay.

Q Okay. For my question, I'm interested in how PRT members are prepared for deployment prior to going in country. Specifically, could you address some of the training and/or education that they -- that is made available or they are required to go through? Thank you.

MR. REEKER: There is some training. I'm not a great expert on this -- it's another thing we could follow up with you and get you kind of chapter and verse from -- I have a guy here who focuses on what we call "regional coordination" and knows a lot about this, and also from the folks in Washington.

But I know they go through a PRT course that's offered I think at the Foreign Service Institute, which is the State Department's training arm there in Arlington, Virginia. And that is an evolving thing. It's a new course that they've developed because this was special -- sort of gives you the interagency view on things as well as the same kind of training we all go through to come out here -- some security aspects, a little bit of area studies, which I wish could be more because for somebody like me who didn't have a background in this region, I'm learning every day, but I think to really understand the region, the history, is pretty crucial. So they are trying to add in more of that.

Obviously as we get the specialists, they don't need the particular training. They need more the general -- they need to be prepared for the environment they're going to work in, and hopefully their specialization comes with them. I've found, for instance, that my experience in the Balkans where I spent a lot of time -- Kosovo, Macedonia -- is actually pretty useful out here in understanding how some of these interethnic things work. And you find that in the State Department -- that there is people with various experiences which can apply if not -- not perfectly, but certainly give you a basis of experience for this kind of work.

And then once they get out here, we do keep all the PRT people in Baghdad for a few days. They go through sort of an orientation to how the embassy is structured, recent developments, communicating with each other. And then I think they get up there and the PRT folks that I've talked to in the couple places I've visited -- I think they actually really enjoy being on their own and not falling into some of the bureaucracy that we experience just because inevitably this is a huge embassy -- over 1,000 people involved, plus the military presence, MNFI. And these guys are out there in a small team working hand-in-hand basically, able to kind of deal with things on their own,

make their own decisions, set their own priorities along the broad guidelines that come out from the ambassador and General Petraeus.

So there's a lot of learning on the go I think. And what we've actually seen is people that have done it -- and this is hard service. Don't kid yourself. There's very few spots where it's cushy. But it's interesting enough that you're getting people to sign up for a second year, and that's something we haven't seen a lot of with the Iraq service in general.

MR. HOLT: Excellent. And we'll be following up, as I said, and then make contacts -- and make sure everybody gets the information -- we get that all socialized through.

Austin Bay.

Q Yeah. I've got too many questions to ask after this. I'll just start off with this one first -- I'll try to keep this to two. There's been a lot of talk for several years -- as a matter of fact, there was an essay I read from Kennedy School of Government in -- I think it was finally published in 2004. I saw a draft in 2003 -- Goldwater-Nichols for civilian agencies and the attempt to try to truly create expeditionary nation-building or developmental forces. MR. REEKER: Yeah.

Q Now, you have a Balkan background you just told us about -- but to a degree you're learning there in Iraq and improvising now.

MR. REEKER: Yeah.

Q (Inaudible) -- this Goldwater-Nichols idea to me is something like anticipatory diplomacy. Are PRTs like -- first of all, would a Goldwater-Nichols for civilian agencies that put a premium on expeditionary experience be of use to you now? And secondly -- and again, I know this is more theoretical -- how would you see using that kind of a base to answer the kind of problems you've got in Iraq?

MR. REEKER: You know, I think those are very worthy points, and it's something that was picked up on earlier. You may have read in the past couple years the initiative to create a sort of rapid reaction force within the State Department -- interagency in many instances. There's a guy called Carlos Pasqual who has since retired from the Foreign Service -- I think he's at Brookings now -- who has written about this a bit. He headed up that effort for a couple of years, put in place these teams.

Again, some of it's people, you know, assigned and standing by, constantly reviewing, training, preparing for things; others -- sort of a reserve list, if you would, just as the military has such a thing -- people with specializations. So you know that, you know somebody has done a certain kind of work in Kosovo, you quickly grab them from their latest assignment, which may be an economic reporting officer in Cambodia, and you say, "Hey, we need you on a plane into Baghdad to spend the next three, maybe six months working at this PRT, applying some of the skill that you learned before." That's definitely been identified as what we need. That's the sort of 21st century diplomacy that we need.

Now, we don't -- doesn't mean you give up your traditional diplomacy, which is not always well understood. We've got to have representation of the United States around the globe, but you've seen this sort of repositioning that they've done more recently since we have a finite number of diplomats. It really bring it home to you when we're here and working very closely with our military colleagues as we do -- you know, for every meeting I go to as the ambassador's counselor for public affairs -- I'm not joking -- there are probably 20 military people. And it's great. They get stuff done. They've got specializations. They've got it down to a great process. We just don't have the same culture or resources, certainly in terms of personnel.

I think a lot of looking at that will continue to go on. I think it is going on to a certain degree. And Ambassador Crocker has addressed this a bit. He got some press in The Washington Post that cited a cable that he had written sort of saying, "I need the right people." And that was to suggest that the people out here weren't good people, but it's, you know, getting the ones with the right skill sets and sort of saying, "Hey, if we're a department at war, we need to step up to this challenge."

And I think we've seen a little change, certainly in the couple of months I've been here. We're seeing more responsiveness. The team that Crocker has put together really is something, if you think that the U.S. ambassador to Greece, Charlie Ries, left that job and the very nice residence in Athens a year early to come out here and head up the economic team at the embassy. He's probably the foremost guy certainly at the State Department, maybe throughout the whole U.S. government on the European Union, for instance. Now, how does that translate into Iraq? Well, he really knows economics. He understands multi-national operations on this. He understands the international organizations, IMF, the World Bank. So he's heading up the whole economic portfolio and integrating in USAID's efforts, the Treasury Department's office, the reconstruction office that's here.

Similarly -- she also happens to be his wife, but Marcie Ries was U.S. ambassador in Albania, and she came here to be part of Ryan's team to head up the political-military office, which she has a strong background in and has worked closely with the military over time.

You have the U.S. ambassador to Bangladesh, Pat Butenis, who left that job to come and be the deputy chief of mission to Ryan Crocker, bringing just amazing years of interagency management and administrative skill.

So it's looking as if this is kind of new territory in a sense for us bureaucratically, and whatever comes out of Iraq -- the big -- the experience, I think we will have learned about some new ways of doing things, particularly in this interagency realm.

Q The thing is, Mr. Reeker, is that we're here three-and-a- half years down the pike, and it's -- I'm going to follow up. You said you were learning now. Do we have time to pull this off in Iraq? Do you have the time to do the kind of grassroots work that Richard Fernandez was talking about?

MR. REEKER: Well, that's -- you know, those are good questions. I don't know if I can answer that. As we were saying earlier, and Secretary Gates was talking about the political "reconciliation" is the word that gets used, is much more difficult and much harder than many

people anticipated. And that is part of the question is the time. What does it take to take a people that's been through what the Iraqis have and what their traditions are and are not and convert them into a different thing where they can find mechanisms in which they can compromise and accommodate and ultimately have some sort of reconciliation. How long that takes is the big question. And if you look at the experience, I think there's no doubt that many people have written on that there were things that were tried at the beginning that did not anticipate problems that arose. And hindsight is famous, of course.

From our perspective, we sort of are where we are, and you've got Ryan Crocker is at least in charge of this who is probably the foremost Mideast expert -- certainly this part of the Mideast, having served here before, having been ambassador in most of the neighboring countries, having spent time in Northern Iraq even before the invasion and then having come out here early on and then having been ambassador to Pakistan.

So we're on it and trying to apply all of the things that we have learned just to see what we can do to help -- ultimately help the Iraqis, who are the ones that do have to make the decisions.

MR. HOLT: David Axe.

Q Sir, hi. It's David Axe with Aviation Week.

You know, I'd have to disagree with the assessment that the top- down attitudes in Iraq are the result of Saddam's 30-year rule. That strikes me as a deep -- a more deeply rooted cultural phenomenon. And --

MR. REEKER: Yeah, I think you're right. I mean, it goes back -- and again, not being an expert on this region, myself -- but it goes back culturally -- much further back. Yeah.

Q Right. "Much" as in, you know, centuries if not millennia. And in light of that, it seems to me that this grassroots effort to reform Iraq starting with local bodies is -- it's doomed. You're swimming upstream against a massive current, and until there's a national reconciliation, no grassroots effort is going to succeed. So how would you react to that assessment, that this is all pretty much wasted effort?

MR. REEKER: Well, the thing is that a number of grassroots efforts have succeeded. I mean, look at Anbar. Look at Ninawa province. Look at the other provinces that have taken over their own security. Of course, I think it's not always fair to compare the Kurdish regions, which are way ahead in many ways and where the local regional government has made a big difference and chose a big difference. I think you even see it in Baghdad in some of the neighborhoods where these local councils have sprung up, often with our kind of help and prodding and laying the basis for it. They've figured out how to make certain accommodations and get certain things done.

Is it enough? No. It's something that I think has to go hand in hand. But if you only try to do the central government outward, I don't think you're going to be successful either because first and foremost the Iraqi constitution very much calls for devolution of power and recognizing regions, letting them take more control of their lives.

I think that the problem that you face is the long traditions that you have, but under Saddam there was no opportunity for any semblance of local organization or even basic social structures were kind of quashed under the Ba'athist regime. And those things have to get build up again, too. So they go back to the -- some of the basic things -- the most basic elements, which were tribe, family and sect. And that's where you've seen some of those things then emerge as the real problems in fostering a reconciliation.

So I think -- you know, there are no perfect answers to this, but you've got to go at it from both ends. And so the PRT program is designed to go out and get things moving on the local level, and there have been some successes while so much of our diplomacy -- obviously the ambassador's daily, hourly engagement is focused on trying to help them find ways and mechanisms to move forward on the priorities at the central level.

Q Okay. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Thank you, sir.

Charlie Quidnunc.

Q Yes. I was asking some other folks about a question I had earlier. John Burns was writing in The New York Times about how those of us in the opinion-writing business who support the surge -- we claim that a premature departure would be disastrous. Well, it's incumbent upon us to explain why would things be so much better if we stick around for 18, 24 months or 60 months. What's going to ensure the stability when we leave? Do you have enough PRTs, or do you need to surge the diplomacy as well?

MR. REEKER: Well, I think that is something that is going on -- continuing, in terms of the surge of diplomacy. The plan for that -- (audio break) -- deployment of folks --

OPERATOR: This conference is scheduled to be disconnected automatically in five minutes. To extend the time, please signal for an operator by pressing *0.

MR. REEKER: You guys want to take care of that? I can stick around for a few more minutes.

MR. HOLT: Okay, yeah. Let me take care of that, then see if we can get this on for another five minutes or so. If not, then we'll follow up and I will work to get everybody connected through MNFI.

MR. REEKER: But the sort of "diplomatic surge," if you want to call it that, was designed in three phases so that it would go through the end of this year and end up with about 600 personnel on staff at the PRTs around the country by the end of the year -- various specialists and the types of people I mentioned.

So that goes on while we try to focus on making -- getting the Iraqis to take advantage of the surge. Now, in a place like Ninawa, where I was yesterday, they've done that. The local police, the local military have taken advantage of the efforts of the multi-national force to build their own strength and bring a lot more order and security.

The real successes that you've seen from the surge are of course, Anbar and the so-called "Baghdad belt" area. The question is, will they be able to take advantage of that -- take advantage of those security gains and move the political process forward? That's where they're still grappling, I think. The Iraqi leaders are grappling at these very, very hard issues -- what some people have called existential issues for them, which have really been deepened and sharpened.

And you know, we'll see what General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker can report in about six weeks back in Washington on where they see things, giving their assessment. And they're very determined to make that a very straightforward, honest assessment of what they see on the ground and discuss some of the implications of different options as obviously the leadership, both the administration and the Congress, make decisions about what will come next.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

And Jason, I think we might have time for you real quick. Jason Seeger (sp).

Q Thanks very much. Penalties of coming in last, I guess.

If I can ask one quick question: Given the increase in PRTs in Iraq, has there been ability to continue the same level of supporting Afghanistan as well? That is to say, you had, what, 23 teams in Afghanistan -- are they still fully armed and functional there?

MR. REEKER: You know, the --

(END OF AVAILABLE AUDIO.)

END.